

Today if you give your heart to God, some soul might come with you. Your influence may bring another. But you wait until tomorrow and that soul that would have come today does not come. And that one keeps others away from God, and the influence of those keeps many others away from God, and soon. Man, do you think you can ever call that influence to halt? Giving *your* heart to God tomorrow, will not do it. You can *never* do it! You could never stand face to face with God and answer at judgment—never! There is a debt you can never pay. Paul did a mighty work for God. Fearlessly he faced the mobs, dauntlessly he stood before kings and confessed his blessed Savior. He carried the gospel to the very heart centers of the world. He did more than any other man to bring this world to the foot of the cross. But all the work of his life could not overthrow the effect of that influence that he sent forth never to be recalled, before heaven's glory smote him to the dust on the road to Damascus. No wonder he rested solely upon the grace of God for salvation. Grace! Grace!! O how he loved to preach it. It was his only hope.

"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be."

There is not a person but who is casting an unconscious influence about you right now. Right now you are helping to form some one's character. I know for myself, that a great many people who perhaps never saw me, never knew me, never heard of me, have helped to form my character. I analyze my real self and I find that I am merely a bundle of influences. Little newsboys, little bootblacks with whom I have come in contact have left their impressions upon me just as surely as have governors and senators. Little boys and girls in the schoolroom have left indelible impressions on me. Members of my congregations have been important factors in the formation of my character. Distant friends have been moulding the same as those that are nearer, while perhaps no earthly force has been more potent than that of a godly mother. But over all, above all, and in all, stand one whose influence over me has made me what I am of good—even Jesus Christ whom I worship and adore.

Strange it was that when Jesus Christ chose the little band of men to whom he was going to intrust the mighty work of evangelizing the world, that He should choose the men he did. Is it possible that God could no longer find a Moses, or a Daniel, or a Samuel, or a Solomon, that would serve him? If it possible that Christ could not bring some Nicodemus, or Joseph of Arimathea to say "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee?" Is it possible that God, who

knoweth the hearts of all men, could find no men of wealth, or education, or power among men to become his apostles? I cannot understand God's ways. This I know, God's ways are never man's ways. When man chooses followers, he longs for men of wealth, men of mighty brain, men of great influence. But not so with the Son of God. He goes down the shore of Galilee and there he sees some lowly fishermen casting their nets into the sea, and he calls them; "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men." And he goes up into the city of Capernaum and sees a publican, a despised tax-gatherer sitting at the receipt of custom, and he calls him, "Follow me" and so on until he has his little band of twelve—unlearned, untaught, rough, rude, lowly men.

You and I go into the diamond fields and pick up a stone. We see nothing but a crude, worthless bit of stone, such as may be found anywhere. A professional jeweler, or a geoloist picks it up after we have thrown it away and sees a glittering diamond of rarest kind—a stone of immense value—a stone that would some day grace the crown of a king. Jesus Christ down on Lake Galilee saw these men—cast off by the world as worthless. The world could see nothing in them. He saw "diamonds in the rough." He saw men of rarest kind—character of immense value, men whose names some day should be inscribed upon the foundations of the city of the King of kings.

But they were "diamonds in the rough." They would need a great deal of cutting and polishing—they would have to go thro a long and tedious process of refining. What power was to do this? What power was going to take these rude, simple, unlettered men and fit them as leaders in the mightiest movement heaven and earth ever saw? He would preach to them. Yes, but his words fell on dull ears. They stood perplexed. They knew not what he meant. His simplest stories and utterances were absolutely incomprehensible to them. "Master, declare unto us this parable." "Master, we know not what Thou sayest." All the preaching of Christ never would have made Peter, or John, or James ready for the work. He would work miracles before them, that they might see, understand, believe. He would open the eyes of the blind, that they might know what he meant when he said, "I am the light of the world." He would feed the multitude with a few loaves of bread, that they might know what he meant when he said, "I am the bread of life." He would raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead and call Lazarus forth from the tomb that they might know what he meant when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life." But before all these scenes these

men stood simply stupefied, utterly amazed. All his teaching, backed by miraculous doings never would have given Christianity a Peter, or a Matthew. When he would have left them, Peter would simply have gone back fishing, saying, "I saw wondrous things," and Matthew would have gone to collecting taxes again, saying, "I heard mysterious things." What was the power then by which Christ prepared these mighty preachers of righteousness to go forth and convert the world. Simply the power of his influence. Every day as they walked with him, there was a flow of virtue, of holiness, of power from him into them. They realized it not. They were unconscious of it. But every day they became better men, purer men, more Christlike, until at last they became simply mirrors reflecting the blessed "image of Christ." When men looked at them they saw Christ. When they saw the spirit of these men, saw their power, they marvelled because they knew they were unlearned and ignorant men, but they took note of them, "*that they had been with Jesus.*" Multitudes had heard Jesus preach, multitudes had seen him perform miracles, but these men *had been with him*, they had been his bosom companions, they had been daily under the power of his influence. And so, dear Christian, you may know what Jesus preached, you may know of his miracles, but unless you get close to Jesus, walk daily with him, commune with him as a bosom friend, you will never become a power for him. "They had been with Jesus." There is the secret of it all. God give us not less wealth, not less intellect, but give us more men who have been with Jesus.

"O, for a closer walk with God
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb."

The influence of Christ upon these men had made them what they were. By being with Christ they had become like him. There had been an unconscious flow of the Christ-life, of virtue, of peace, of good-will into these men. So when Stephen cried out as they were stoning him to death, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge," it was only a part of that spirit that cried from the cross, "Father, forgive them they know not what they do."

And now notice the extent of that influence that came from the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." Flowing on down thro the apostles, and from them to the converted Jews, and Greeks and Romans, and from them thro the heathen nations of Europe, and from Europe it has penetrated every continent, and every isle of the sea. It has spread itself all over the world, purifying, civilizing, Christianizing. What is building all these asylums,